



# REPOSITIONING SPORT AS STRATEGIC UNIVERSITY INFRASTRUCTURE

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# UNIVERSITIES ARE FACING A HUMAN CONNECTION CHALLENGE



# KNOWING YOUR VALUE



10.48% higher **retention** rates among intramural sport participants.



93.5% of sport participants said it supported their **sense of belonging** to the institution and its community.

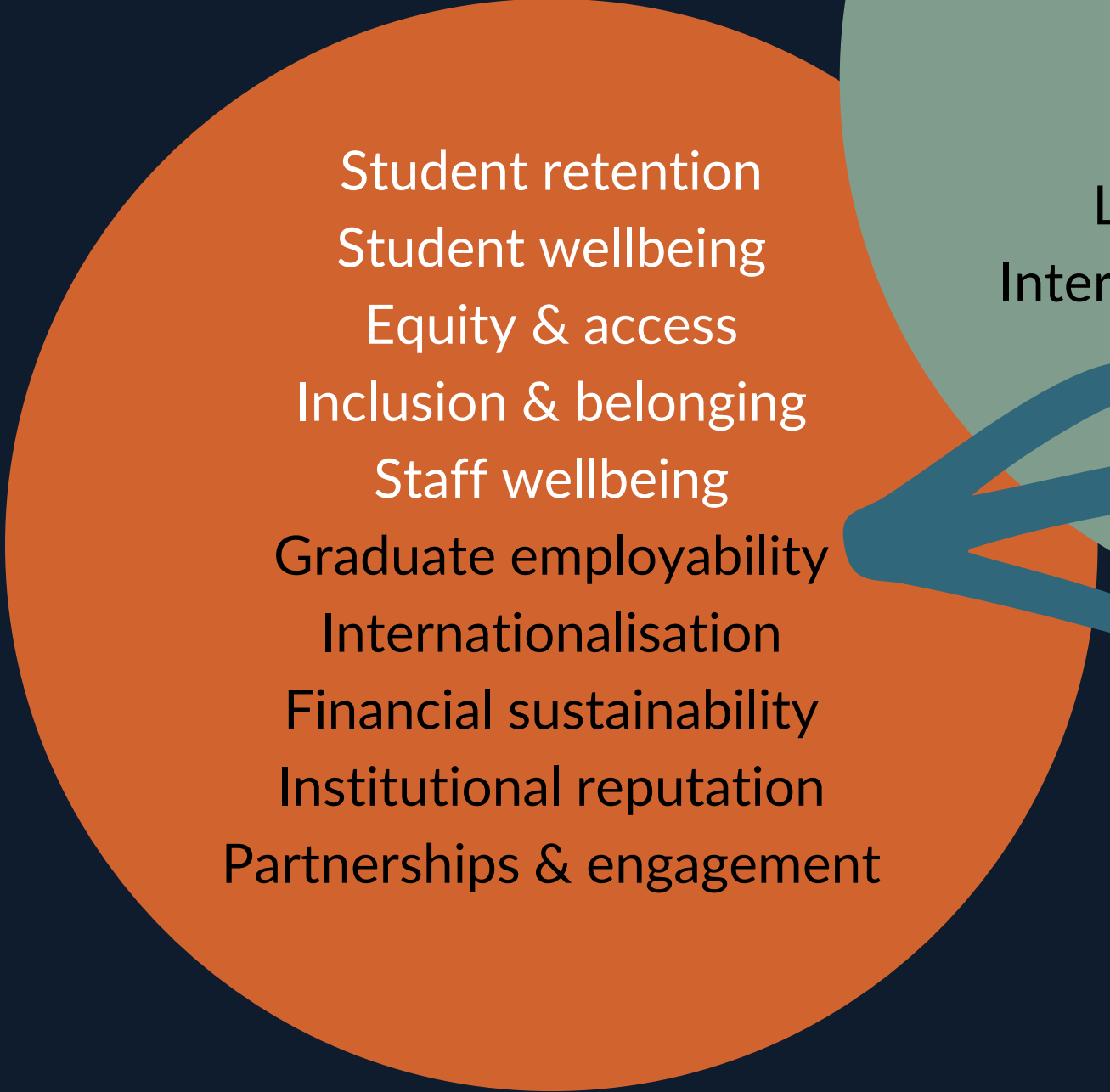


Team sport nearly **halved depression scores** in university students



84.5% said sport **helped them interact** with a wider group of students





University KPIs



The Value of Sport



Sport Dept KPIs





# MEASURE WHAT MATTERS

Registrations > Retention

Diversity > Inclusion

Engagements > Experience

Competition Results > Social Connection



# PIVOT YOUR GOVERNANCE

- ✓ Departmental accountabilities
- ✓ Strategy alignment
- ✓ Organisational capabilities
- ✓ Lived experience in decision-making



## Setting the Scene: Why We Reimagined Sport at UniSC



At UniSC Sport & Fitness, we recognised that our approach to student sport had become stagnant, with the same key offerings repeated year after year. It was, in many ways, a “copy and paste” model that no longer reflected the needs or expectations of our student body.

Post-COVID, universities have placed a renewed focus on building sticky campuses- places where students feel connected, engaged, and motivated to return. We saw sport as the perfect vehicle to help rebuild that sense of on-campus community and belonging.

At the same time, we lacked meaningful data to demonstrate the impact of our programs. Poor tracking made it difficult to quantify our value in enhancing the student experience- a growing concern in the context of a shifting SSAF landscape and increased financial scrutiny across the sector.

Between 2023 and 2024, our team also went through significant staff changes. With that came fresh eyes, new energy, and a willingness to question how, and why, we do things.

All of these factors led us to take a step back and reimagine how we deliver sport. The goal was simple: to design sport that is responsive, inclusive, data-informed, and truly impactful on the student journey.



# ELEVATE SOCIAL IMPACT IN YOUR PROGRAM DESIGN





**MONASH**  
University





**TELL YOUR STORY -  
DIFFERENTLY**



## Sport connects people



## How does sport drive Student Experience?

The link between mental well-being and physical activity is well-established, Australian universities are producing world-class research on the subject. We know that lack of physical activity is a global issue. The World Health Organization calls it a 'disaster in slow motion'. intensity caused by itself for depression. This link is and there is that demonstrates physical ac

## How did sport help Universities re-engage students post Covid-19?

It is no secret that there is a link between physical activity and emotional well-being. This was particularly evident in the 2020 mandatory lockdowns, with pressure placed upon Governments to enable individuals to engage in physical activity outside the home as early and as frequently as possible. Most universities were very quick to adapt to new challenges presented by Covid-19 and lockdown and delivered on-line physical activity options for staff and students to complement

Post-lockdown, University of Queensland experienced a very high uptake of the initial release of a limited sporting program. A survey of students engaging with this program indicated that students value the social certainty that sport provides; they know that if they show up for scheduled training or activities, so will their friends and team-mates. At a time when there are fewer people on campus and it is less likely that students will bump into their friends, sport is giving them a focus that is

## How can sport influence Student Recruitment?

As well

## How can sport assist with Graduate Employment Outcomes?

Graduate Employment Outcomes is the most influential factor in the performance-based funding introduced by the Commonwealth Government in 2020<sup>13</sup>. "I would not be in the career position I am in today, if I had not had the opportunity LTUFC provided in

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## How does sport affect Student Success?

Universities across Australia and internationally are seeking to assess the impact of sport on a student's academic outcomes. La Trobe University's studies reflect a 10% higher

"What we know is students who exercise regularly - at least 3 times per week - have a higher level of academic performance compared to those who do not. Later in the study, we found that students who were recruited through sport had a 10% higher graduation rate than those who were recruited through other means. This is a significant finding, especially given that the cost of sport is relatively low. The impact of sport on student recruitment and performance is clear. We need to continue to invest in sport as a key strategy for improving student success."

It is the experience students have as a whole – their learning, their social engagement, the memories and friendships they build – that contributes to their well-being.

**WHAT IF SPORT COULD BECOME  
THE MOST IMPORTANT  
STRATEGIC INFRASTRUCTURE  
UNIVERSITIES HAVE?**

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